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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
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List of issues and questions with regard to the consideration of an initial report*

Syria

1. The pre-session working group examined the initial report of Syria (CEDAW/C/SYR/1).

General

2. Please provide information on the process of preparation of the report, including on whether non-governmental organizations, particularly women's organizations, were consulted, whether it was presented to Parliament or any designated high-level authority and whether it was adopted by the Government.

3. The report indicates that the Syrian Council for Family Affairs has recommended the removal of all reservations to the Convention with the exception of reservations to Article 16 (1) (c) and (f) and Article 29, para. 1 (a) and that the matter has been sent to the Legal Office of the Syrian Government for an opinion (pp. 10, 24, 30). Please describe any progress in this regard.

4. The report does not present adequate statistical information, disaggregated on the basis of sex and ethnicity, relating to areas covered by the Convention, in particular education, employment and health. Please provide such information.

5. The report indicates the multi-ethnic population of Syria (p. 5). Please provide information on whether women of certain ethnic groups face multiple forms of discrimination and the measures that have been taken to address such discrimination.

Articles 1 and 2

6. Please clarify whether under the Syrian legal system, international treaties take precedence over domestic laws and provide information on court cases, if any,

* The page numbering in this list of issues and questions refers to the English version of the report.

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where the provisions of the Convention have been invoked, and the outcome of such cases.

7. Please describe what remedies are available to women with complaints of gender-based discrimination, including independent mechanisms (such as an ombudsman) and statistical information on women's use of such remedies.

8. The report indicates that the General Women's Federation submitted a memorandum to the People's Assembly (Parliament) for amendment of discriminatory articles of law and that the Syrian Women's League submitted a memorandum for amendment to the Nationality Act which was also "presented to the Cabinet and is in the final stages of discussion" (p. 10). The report also indicates a bill to amend article 3 of the Syrian Nationality Act tabled by 35 members of the People's Assembly was included in the agenda of the Assembly in its May-June 2004 session (p. 47). In addition, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs has also reviewed discriminatory laws and proposed amendments or new laws (p. 11). Please describe the amendments and new laws recommended, describe the actions taken by the People's Assembly and the Cabinet in this regard and the timeline anticipated for any contemplated law reform.

Article 3

9. Please provide information regarding the status, role and human and financial resources of the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs since its establishment in 2003. Has the Government sought or considered seeking technical and financial assistance from the specialized United Nations entities, in particular from the United Nations Development Program?

Article 5

10. The report states that one of the "tangible results" of the implementation of the Convention is that "some of the stereotyped images of women, men and children have been removed from the school curricula" (p. 22) and that the Government has taken measures to promote gender mainstreaming in school curricula by altering portrayal of stereotyped roles for both men and women (p. 35). The report also states that the Ministry of Education is engaged in planning gender training workshops for textbook authors (p. 51) and that the Ministry of Information has concentrated efforts on "awareness-raising through training for senior personnel in all fields of the media in matters relating to ... the rights of women (p. 23). Please indicate any other progress made in eliminating stereotypes from textbooks and the media.

Violence against women

11. A recent study on domestic violence in Syria conducted by the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs with financial support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women showed that approximately 25 per cent of women were subjected to violence in the home. Please indicate whether a law on domestic violence is being considered and what other steps the Government is taking to combat domestic violence?

12. The report indicates that "Syria still lacks homes to provide [battered women] with shelter" (p. 35). Please indicate plans for the establishment of shelters for

battered women and obstacles presented so far. Is the Government of Syria considering providing financial support for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd which runs the only shelter for abused women in Syria?

13. The report notes that a commission of legal experts studied the articles of the Penal Code relating to "honour crimes" and proposed a draft amendment (p. 105). Please describe the amendment proposed, indicate its status and the timeline anticipated for reform of such provisions.

14. The report indicates that while there are legal provisions that criminalize sexual harassment "no measures worthy of note, however, have been taken in this regard and women usually resort to individual solutions for this problem" (pp. 14, 55). Please explain this statement and provide details of the remedies readily available to, and pursued by, women facing sexual harassment.

Article 6

15. Please provide information about the numbers of women trafficked from, through and to Syria.

16. The report indicates that "trafficking in women is punishable" under the Suppression of Prostitution Act No. 10 of 1961 (pp. 35-36). Please indicate whether the Government is considering enacting specific legislation to combat trafficking and describe the measures taken to provide specialized training on trafficking to members of the police, border guards and the judiciary?

17. Please provide information on the rehabilitative and protective measures in place for women victims of trafficking for purposes of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, including a description of the effectiveness of these measures.

Articles 7 and 8

18. According to the report, the Ninth Five Year Plan (2001-05) set down a 30 per cent minimum target for participation of women in decision-making (p. 31). However, the participation of women in decision-making remains low (12 per cent in the People's Assembly and 7 per cent of the Cabinet) (pp. 39-40). What concrete measures have been taken, including temporary special measures, such as the establishment of quotas or incentives to achieving this target, taking into account Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention?

19. The report acknowledges that the number of Syrian women working in international organizations is "modest" but states that this is due to "stereotyped roles of women in society whereby movement and travel for women is for the most part limited" (p. 43). Please indicate whether such stereotypes are also an obstacle to women's participation in other areas, such as the political and economic spheres, and what concrete measures are being taken to overcome such obstacles.

Article 10

20. Please provide information on the education level and access to education of girls and young women from ethnic minorities and rural areas.

21. The report shows that while 64.5 per cent of basic education teachers are women, women comprise only 15 per cent of university teachers and that this is due

to "lack of government policies encouraging closure of the gap" (p. 49). Please indicate measures that are being considered to bridge this gap.

Article 11

22. Please provide information on women's participation in the work force, including women's participation in the informal sector.

23. The report states that "no complaints about gender-based discrimination in the field of employment have been lodged, signifying that the laws are fully applied in the regular employment market" (p. 52). However, it goes on to point out that employment offices regularly fail to offer job opportunities to women registered with them; many employers have "no qualms" about violating provisions of the Employment Act due to poor implementation of such provisions; and that, if initiated, legal proceedings drag on for years and are exploited by employers to pressurize employees (p. 56). Please indicate concrete measures contemplated to ensure compliance with the Employment Act and other relevant legislation and improve women's access to justice.

24. According to the report, women are forbidden from working in certain kinds of jobs that are deemed "detrimental to health or morally damaging" and during certain hours at night (pp. 11, 55). Please provide a full list of the jobs that women are forbidden from working in and indicate whether the potential discriminatory impact of such provisions of the Employment Act of 1959 on women's employment has been evaluated and provide details of any such evaluation, especially in light of Article 11 (1) (b) of the Convention.

25. The report states that Syria has no legislation (i) providing for flexible job patterns that give men and women the opportunity to combine work and family responsibilities, such as job sharing or permanent part time work (ii) on paternity leave and (iii) allowing couples to divide maternity leave (p. 54). In addition, the report mentions that the childcare facilities are scattered, disorganized and not up to par (p. 54). Please indicate measures that are being implemented to overcome such obstacles to women's equal opportunities in the labour market.

26. The report notes the large female workforce in the informal job market, where there is no control or social protection. What steps are being taken or contemplated to ensure legal and social protection for the women in the informal job market, as well as those women undertaking contractual or piece work?

Article 12

27. Please indicate whether existing programmes to combat HIV/AIDS integrate a gender perspective and whether special measures for prevention are in place that target women.

28. The report indicates that "a woman still needs her husband to consent to her leaving the house or to accompany her to the health service" and that the "failure to take women's wishes into consideration may also inhibit their use of some of the available services" (pp. 64-65). Please indicate measures contemplated to address these barriers to women's access to, and use of, health-care facilities.

Article 14

29. According to the report, rural women have high rates of illiteracy and unemployment, lack access to vocational training, do not own land and are not given the right to make decisions on family and economic matters (p. 74). The report states that there is a programme being run by the Rural Women's Development Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform to "integrate the development of rural women into programmes of action as a main strategic concern" (p. 14). Please elaborate on the concrete measures being taken (including through the programme by the Rural Women's Development Unit) to address issues faced by rural women, and describe the impact of such measures.

Article 16

30. The report states that the articles of the Personal Status Act are largely discriminatory and that "work is currently under way for the proposal of a modern family law that guarantees equal rights for men and women" (p. 15). Please provide information about the scope of these proposals and their anticipated compliance with the Convention as well as the anticipated time frame for action thereon.

Optional Protocol

31. Please indicate any progress made towards ratification/accession of the Optional Protocol to the Convention.